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Title: Need to explore on Rural Water Supply Programme.

SHRI BHARTRAHARI MAHTAB (CUTTACK): The provision of safe drinking water has important equity and development implications. Women often spend considerable time for collecting water and the consumption of contaminated water has an adverse impact on human health and productivity.

The Government in the past has quite ambitiously committed itself to the task of providing safe drinking water to all rural habitations in the next five years, yet this goal remains elusive.

The allocation for rural water supply programme has been increased from Rs.1302 crore in 1997-98 (revised estimates) to Rs.1627 crore in 1998-99. This enhanced outlay will cover about one lakh habitations. It is important to note that when the Government statistics claim that a very high proportion of villages have been provided with safe drinking water, it merely implies that handpumps or standposts have been installed in these villages. It does not necessarily imply that water is being provided through these facilities or that the village community is utilising this water. There is need to focus attention on the repairs and maintenance of handpumps. A UNICEF commissioned study says that over half of the non-users of India Mark II handpumps said that the pumps were located at far away places, making their use inconvenient, and one out of every three non-users felt that the handpump water salty, rusty and had medicinal smell.

Even as we approach the new millennium, we have not been able to guarantee every Indian citizen one of the most fundamental human needs, that is, enough drinking water of sufficient quality.

I am sorry to state that the current Budget has not paid the desired attention to this issue, though there was a commitment to this aspect in the National agenda.